

House Armed Services Committee

Ike Skelton, Chairman

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HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE APPROVES FISCAL YEAR 2008 DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Restoring Military Readiness and Taking Care of the Troops Are Top Priorities

Washington, DC – House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-MO) announced that H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, was reported favorably by the committee on a vote of 58 to 0.

H.R. 1585 authorizes \$503.8 billion in budget authority for the Department of Defense (DoD) and the national security programs of the Department of Energy (DoE). The bill also authorizes \$141.8 billion to support ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan during fiscal year 2008.

In a statement released after the committee's approval of the defense authorization bill, Skelton discussed some of the bill's most significant provisions:

"This year's defense authorization bill concentrates on our military's critical readiness needs by setting priorities that will support our troops in the field, enable our nation to meet immediate military requirements, and preserve our ability to deter and respond to future threats.

"After more than five years at war, the strain of ongoing operations has taken a substantial toll on our military. Continued reports on the state of readiness for our ground forces, particularly our non-deployed and next-to-deploy forces, are of deep concern. With long term deployments in harsh environments wearing out military equipment at an accelerated rate, many stateside units are not fully equipped and would not be considered ready if called upon to respond during an emergency. Lack of equipment and the high tempo of operations have forced the services to train only for immediate mission requirements, shortchanging training for other types of threats.

"In spite of being a nation at war, the United States has not fully mobilized to respond to the needs of our military to meet the current mission and to maintain U.S. military readiness. To tackle this problem, the bill creates a Defense Readiness Production Board to identify critical readiness requirements, monitor and assess industrial capacity, and serve as a focal point for Congress and the Secretary of Defense on readiness issues. Once critical readiness requirements are identified, the services will have access to a \$1 billion Strategic Readiness Fund and the Department of Defense will have new procurement authorities to rapidly attend to these pressing needs.

“Further initiatives in the bill to restore readiness and reduce our strategic risk include the authorization of \$13.6 billion for the Army and \$8.4 billion for the Marine Corps to address equipment reset requirements, \$1 billion for National Guard and Reserve equipment from their unfunded requirements list, and \$250 million to address training shortfalls throughout the services. Another provision requires the Department of Defense to share its plans on reconstituting our prepositioned war stocks, which have been seriously depleted.

“For our troops in the field and in harm’s way, the bill dedicates substantial resources to improve protection, including an additional \$4.1 billion for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) Vehicles, which have been found to dramatically reduce the casualties caused by improvised explosive devices and are the top force protection priority for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Funding is also provided for the purchase of personal body armor and for up-armor humvee production.

“Readiness has also been impacted by repeated deployments that have stretched and strained military personnel, with the Army and Marine Corps under particular stress. In keeping with the committee’s long advocacy of the need to boost end strength, this bill authorizes an increase in the size of the military by 36,000 Army troops and by 9,000 Marines, which will help meet our commitments, reduce the strain on the force, as well as bolster readiness.

“As the use of the National Guard has expanded in recent years, there has been increasing concern that the National Guard and Reserves have been called upon to meet an ever expanding range of requirements. Given this trend, the bill gives the National Guard enhanced authorities to fulfill its expanded role in the nation’s defense, authorizes a fourth star for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, and makes the National Guard Bureau a joint activity of the Department of Defense. The bill also requires the Department of Defense to evaluate the preparedness of the National Guard for homeland missions, such as disaster response, rather than only evaluating the Guard’s readiness for war time contingencies.

“In order to maintain a strong national defense, our nation must take care of our service members and their families. To this end, the bill provides a 3.5 percent pay raise for all service members, which is .5 percent more than the President’s budget request, and extends the authority for the Defense Department to offer bonuses and incentive pay. The bill preserves important health benefits by prohibiting fee increases in TRICARE and the TRICARE pharmacy program for service members and retirees. Provisions also include the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act, which addresses the problems identified at Walter Reed Army Medical Center earlier this year.

“The bill also upholds our strong commitment to those who have served and their families by providing an expansion of the combat-related special compensation for combat-related disabled retirees and by establishing a special survivor indemnity allowance to begin to address the offset to the survivor benefit plan and the dependents’ indemnity plan.

“In addition to the emphasis on military readiness and taking care of the troops, the defense authorization bill also includes many notable policy provisions. Furthering the committee’s important oversight responsibilities concerning U.S. military operations in Iraq, the bill requires the Secretary of Defense to submit a detailed report on the implementation of the

Joint Campaign Plan for Iraq, on efforts made by the Iraqi government to achieve political reconciliation, and on the metrics being used to measure American efforts in Iraq, including the implications for U.S. force levels there. This report will be based upon the assessments of the U.S. Commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, and the U.S. Ambassador in Iraq, Ryan Crocker, and will enable the committee to ask tough questions and make frank judgments.

“With regard to U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, the bill requires the Secretary of Defense to produce a comprehensive report that outlines the strategic direction of U.S. activities in Afghanistan and includes concrete performance indicators and measures of progress. While providing funds for the Afghan National Security Forces, the bill also calls for a long-term sustainment plan to build the logistics and other capabilities Afghanistan needs for long-term security. To ensure even greater accountability, the bill establishes a new Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction and expands the jurisdiction of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction.

“Efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and materials are critical to our security, and this year’s bill recognizes this by increasing funding to strengthen and expand the Department of Energy National Nuclear Security Administration’s non-proliferation programs and the Department of Defense’s Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program.

“Finally, this bill calls for the Secretary of Defense to undertake a basic look at the Department’s roles and missions. A similar effort was undertaken in 1947, which helped to shape the Pentagon through the National Security Act. It is time once again to analyze Department’s role and missions, identify the services’ core competencies, and examine possible duplication of effort among the branches.

“Members of the House Armed Services Committee have worked very hard on this defense bill and deserve to be proud of the resulting legislation. I want to thank every member of the committee for their efforts to make this the best bill possible for our military and for our nation. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as chairman and I hope to continue this committee’s tradition of bipartisan cooperation as we fulfill our Constitutional obligation to raise and support the U.S. Armed Forces.”

A detailed summary of H.R. 1585 as reported by the House Armed Services Committee is available at <http://armedservices.house.gov/>.

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